

The American Institute of Physics

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PHYSICS FORUM

The American Institute of Physics

IT is perhaps appropriate that the second editorial in this series should deal with the activities of the American Institute of Physics through which the new publication program for physics in America has been organized. In one sense the American Institute of Physics is the child of the five parent national societies which have cooperated in forming it. In another sense, however, it has followed the more usual course of being born of two parents, the one financial distress and the other organizational disintegration. How these two unpromising parents gave rise to so lusty a child may be explained as follows:

On account of the rapid increase in research productivity of American physicists, the American Physical Society had for a dozen years been struggling with the problem of financing its publications, and has had a standing committee on "The Financial Status of the Physical Review." A deficit was successfully avoided by various expedients but the situation finally became acute and the committee decided to approach Mr. Francis P. Garvan of the Chemical Foundation to solicit his support of a ten-year program for handling the publication affairs of the American Physical Society.

When interviewed by Professor Pegram and me, on behalf of this committee, Mr. Garvan expressed immediate interest in the plan and willingness to cooperate, but stated that he had numerous requests from similar groups who were either physicists or closely allied to physics, so that it appeared to him that the physics groups of America were not well organized and that he would much prefer to give his support in such a way as to bring about a better organization on an eventually self-supporting basis. We therefore agreed to make the attempt to bring about a unified association of American physicists with

an ideal program of publication and other activities in the interest of physics and physicists. This was the first parent of the American Institute of Physics.

During this same period it had become increasingly evident that the field of interest in physics had grown to such an extent that the original simple organization and ideal of the American Physical Society was no longer adequate to provide for the development and expression of the various groups of pure and applied physicists, and there had been indications of further disintegration of the American Physical Society through the separation of homogeneous groups interested in special fields to form separate organizations. Another committee of the American Physical Society had been appointed to study this situation, and in consultation with the various groups of physicists to present some plan for preserving unity among physicists, while at the same time allowing the maximum opportunity for the development of interest and activity in all aspects of the subject. This committee on the Organization of Physics was the other parent.

Immediately following the conference with Mr. Garvan, an informal meeting of representatives of the two committees with some others, was called in Chicago and out of the deliberations of this group came the proposal to establish the American Institute of Physics as an agency of the existing national physics groups for the purpose of dealing in the most efficient and effective manner with their common problems.

During the past year the American Institute of Physics has been incorporated, and through its Governing Board and Executive Committee it has devoted its principal attention to the most pressing of all common problems, the problem of publication. The results of this work, with

the generous support of the Chemical Foundation, are now realized in the new schedule of physical publications beginning January first, and described in the first editorial of this series. Through the new arrangements a very considerable economy of publication has been effected. This however is not a net gain since the saving has arisen through the activity of the Institute office at 11 East 38th Street, New York, which itself involves expense for staff and equipment. Roughly speaking, the increased efficiency of publication during the next year will just about balance the cost of maintaining the Institute of Physics and its staff. The efficiency and economy can and will be extended, but the ultimate gain lies in the opportunity which the new arrangement has created for securing increased public interest in physics and financial support for it, and the opportunities in this line are believed to be real and promising. Indeed several large grants have already been obtained for the support of the physics publications.

Having concentrated attention on the rather mechanical aspects of the publication program, the Governing Board proposes next to embark upon a program for dealing with some of the other important problems of organized physics including relationships with local physics clubs, dignified and appropriate publicity, solicitation of financial support, improving contacts with advertisers, and various other measures which have been suggested from time to time or which may be proposed in the future. A Committee on Policy now has such measures under advisement and will report within a few months to the Governing Board, which in turn will report back to the member societies.

The program of the American Institute of Physics is essentially a "long range" program,

aimed at securing the ultimate best development of physics and serving the best interests of its devotees. In order to reach this ultimate objective, and indeed in order to cooperate at all, it is necessary to make minor sacrifices for the sake of major gains. The splendid spirit of cooperation of the member societies and their officers, which has required some sacrifices on all sides, has been exceedingly gratifying to the members of the Governing Board and offers the strongest possible ground for expecting a successful realization of the purposes of the organization.

On behalf of the Governing Board I wish to make three particular acknowledgments. In the first place, this program would have been impossible without the generous assistance of the Chemical Foundation. This assistance has been given with the explicit understanding that the American Institute of Physics and the member societies will make every effort not only to perfect an ideal organization for transacting the business of the physics groups, but also an organization which will be built upon sound business principles so as to become self-sustaining in the shortest possible time. In the second place, we acknowledge the personal assistance of Mr. W. W. Buffum, representing the Chemical Foundation, who has in no instance attempted to dictate the policies of the Institute, but who has generously and very helpfully given of his time and experience toward the constructive planning of the Institute and transaction of its business. In the third place, we wish to express appreciation of the very loyal, whole-hearted and effective cooperation of Director Barton, who has taken the administrative load and handled it efficiently, tactfully and with discretion.

KARL T. COMPTON, *Chairman*
American Institute of Physics

January 3, 1933

Neutrons

The discovery of what may prove to be the third and last of the fundamental corpuscles of matter, and what at any rate is a distinctive kind of ionizing ray, was carried from start to completion in three stages which followed quickly one on another in time but were far apart in

space, in three entirely separate institutes, of three different nations. Such histories have not been rare in physics, yet this one seems abnormal. It is natural to expect that when a physicist has made and published the first advances in a field till then untrodden, those who wish to